

Calendar No. 1972

82D CONGRESS }
2d Session }

SENATE

{ REPORT
{ No. 2036

GRANTING TO CITIZENS OF THE UNITED STATES WHO HAVE ATTAINED THE AGE OF 18 THE RIGHT TO VOTE

JULY 1 (legislative day, JUNE 27), 1952.—Ordered to be printed

Mr. KILGORE, from the Committee on the Judiciary, submitted the following

R E P O R T

[To accompany S. J. Res. 127]

The Committee on the Judiciary, to which was referred the joint resolution (S. J. Res. 127) proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the United States to grant to citizens of the United States who have attained the age of 18 the right to vote, having considered the same, reports favorably thereon, without amendment, and recommends that the bill do pass.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the proposed legislation is to propose an amendment to the Constitution of the United States to grant to citizens of the United States who have attained the age of 18 the right to vote.

STATEMENT

At the present time the issue of what age an individual must be in order to be qualified to vote is a matter to be determined by each State of the United States. One State, Georgia, has already granted the right to vote to persons 18 years of age and over. Other States, however, have established the age of 21 as the legal minimum voting age. The amendment here proposed would prohibit the denial or abridgement by the United States or by any State of the right of persons 18 years of age and older to vote solely on account of age, thus establishing the age of 18 years as the minimum voting age. If adopted by two-thirds of the Members of the Senate and House of Representatives, it would require the approval of three-fourths of the States of the United States. Consequently, the question of whether 18-year-old citizens would be entitled to vote is still largely to be determined by the individual States.

The Standing Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments of the Committee on the Judiciary of the United States Senate conducted hearings on this resolution on June 27, 1952. The former Governor of the State of Georgia, Ellis Arnall, appeared as a witness in favor of this resolution. Former Governor Arnall was Governor of the State of Georgia at the time when that State decided to permit persons between the ages of 18 years and 21 years to vote. As a result of his experience as Governor of Georgia, former Governor Arnall endorsed the proposed constitutional amendment. He described this action of the State of Georgia in the light of the experience since its adoption as being "very salutary and very fine."

Several reasons have been advanced for the adoption of this constitutional amendment. First and foremost probably is the argument that since persons between 18 and 21 years are old enough to be drafted they are old enough to exercise the franchise. In addition, it is argued that at 18 years of age, or near that age, young people are enthusiastic in their desire to participate in political decisions, especially those which vitally affect their existence. It was contended at the hearings on this resolution that if the right to vote is withheld until attainment of the age of 21 years this enthusiasm diminishes. This diminishing enthusiasm represents a loss to the United States as well as a loss to the individual himself.

Some persons may argue that young people between the ages of 18 and 21 years lack sufficient maturity to exercise the right to vote. Senator Moody, the sponsor of this resolution, answered that argument when in his appearance before the subcommittee in support of this resolution he stated:

If they are old enough to fight, if they have sufficient maturity to be entrusted with jet airplanes and assigned to fox holes to defend our liberties, then they are old enough to vote; they are mature enough to assume their responsibilities and rights as full-fledged citizens.

It is not necessary, however, in order to support this resolution to rely on the argument that the age of eligibility for military responsibility and civil responsibility should be uniform. The proposition which this resolution advances has been tested in practice. The State of Georgia has furnished the United States and its sister States with the laboratory proof of the desirability of reducing the minimum voting age to 18 years. A former Governor of that State attests to the success of that experiment. Consequently, the committee recommends the adoption of this resolution and the constitutional amendment which it proposes.